Bison. These animals, which once were spread in vast herds over nearly all of North America, from the Rocky Mountains to the shores of the Atlantic, but now confined to a much narrower limit near the base of the Rocky Mountains, extending from the Mexican provinces in the south, to the latitude of Hudson's Bay in the north, are in size somewhat above the ordinary bullock, and their flesh of a delicious flavour, resembling, and quite equal to, the best of beef.

From the noble bearing and fine proportions of this animal, one instantly admits his gigantic strength, and estimates his splendid utility to man, provided he could be made to bear the yoke. Almost endless efforts have been made by eager and avaricious man to enslave this noble Animal, and humble him to the drudgery of the plough; but with the like result as with the noble Men of the same free country, (almost the only living exceptions;) who, if they lack the merit of meekness and docility, have had and maintained the virtue of courage to contend for their lives with civilized man, and the sternness to resist his slavery.

The flesh of the Buffalo, which is easily procured, furnishes the Indians of those tracts of country over which they still roam, the means of a wholesome subsistence, and they live almost exclusively on it; converting the skins of the animals, their horns, hoofs, and bones to the construction of dresses, shields, bows, &c.

The Buffalo Bull is perhaps one of the most formidable and frightful-looking animals in the world when excited to resistance (as will be seen in some of the various phases through which he is to be passed in the following chapter of accidents and disasters that befall him,) his long and shaggy mane hanging in great profusion over his neck and shoulders, and often extending down quite to the ground.

The colour of the Buffalo, during the first summer, while a calf, is precisely that of a red calf in cultivated fields; but when shedding its first hair it takes another of dark brown, which colour it carries during its life. The horns are short, but, in the male, very large, with the peculiarity that they have but one turn; i. e. they are a simple arch, without the least approach to a spiral form, like those of the common ox or goat species.

The female Buffalo is always much smaller than the male, and invariably distinguished by the peculiar shape of the horns, which are much smaller and more crooked, their points turning more in, towards the head.

One of the most remarkable peculiarities of the Buffalo is the formation and expression of the eye, the ball of which is very large and white, and the iris jet black. The lids of the eye seem always to be strained quite open, and the ball rolling forward and down, so that a considerable part of the iris is hidden behind the lower lid, while the pure white of the eyeball glares out over it in an arch, in the shape of a moon at the end of its first quarter.

The Buffaloes are gregarious, but not migratory. They are found grazing in immense herds, from the Mexican borders to the fifty-fifth degree of north latitude, in all months of the year, including the coldest of winters; and in these northern regions gaining their food by browsing on the limbs and buds of the frozen shrubbery, and pawing for grass through the snow; affording for the Indian sportsman the thrilling subjects for the chase, in that dreary season, as will be shown in some of the subjoined hunting scenes.

Plate No. 3.

WILD HORSES AT PLAY.

Next in importance to the Buffalo, for the use of Man, is the Horse, which is found joint-occupant with the Indian and Buffalo over most of the vast plains and prairies of America as yet unoccupied by cultivating Man. These, though not aborigines, may still have been, by the inscrutable design of Providence, placed in this country for the benefit of man; and we therefore find him in almost every part of North America mounted upon their backs, his faithful and attached friends and companions, in deadly war and in the excitements of the chase.

I believe that these noble animals were first introduced to the American continent by the Spanish invaders of Mexico, and that they have strayed away from their masters and taken wild pasturage, having in time stocked the prairies, as we now find them, to the fifty-fifth degree of north latitude. Like the Buffaloes, they graze over the vast plains at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, and congregate in large families or bands, oftentimes to the amount of several hundreds together. The fact is a very remarkable one, that although these animals have escaped from the familiar hands of man, they should be everywhere found the most rapidly flying from his approach, the shyest animals of the prairie; detecting their enemy, Man, by the extraordinary power of the eye, at a much greater distance than any other animal of the country; and generally, when in motion, running several miles before they stop.

By several times forcing myself into close company with these bands on the prairies, on a fleet horse; and by often deliberately reconnoitring them with a good glass, as well as from the many thousands of them I have seen in the use of the Indians, I have found them to be generally small, and delicate of limb, but tolerably fleet; and a band together, completely, and most pleasingly, mottled; often presenting as many varieties of colours and forms of marks as a kennel of hounds. They are certainly animals capable of performing wonderful feats, and of enduring great fatigue; and, like the Buffalo, subsist entirely on the grass of the prairies; and that in very cold as well as in southern latitudes.

I have found that in the northern and western prairies of America, where the Indian has not been degraded by the withering proximity of avaricious White Man, he has been decidedly improved in his independence and manly and noble bearing, by the use and companionship of the horse. No fact is more apparent than this, to the traveller through the Indian tribes of